SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
INTERVIEW WITH DAVID REICH OF THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH, WITH
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR ECONOMIC SECURITY JOSHUA GOTBAUM AND
DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY SHERRY GOODMAN
PENTAGON ?
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Secretary Perry: Let me start by introducing the people. I've introduced them by name already, but let me tell you who they are and what they do.

Josh Gotbaum is our Assistant Secretary of Defense for Economic Security. Sherry Goodman is the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Environmental Security. I think noteworthy of these titles is that those offices, those organizations, did not exist two years ago. We created them. We created them because we believe that economic security and environmental security are part of our security. That is, environmental issues and economic issues are definitely part of our security. They're part of the U.S. defense missions. Not only the nation's security, but the quality of life in the people of the armed forces depended on paying attention to these, and the economic health of the communities in which we have bases depended on them.

Having come to that judgment, then we believed it was necessary to have an institutional/organizational focus on it, and the creation of these two offices goes to the manifestation of that belief.

Ultimately, what we do is measured by how it affects the readiness of the forces, but we believe this has a direct and measurable effect on the readiness of the

forces, besides having an effect on the well-being of our people, the well-being of the communities in which we live. It makes us better neighbors.

So all of that is background for why we are involved in this and how seriously it is we take it.

We can talk, if you'd like, about some of the programs involved in it, but let me just give you very, very quickly two different aspects of it, quite different aspects of it. These are several articles I'll leave with you which you may or may not have seen dealing with one aspect of this problem which is closing our bases. Closing bases is not new. The bases have been closing under various administrations since World War II. It started to get fairly intense in the late '80s. There were a number of bases closed during the Bush Administration. The difference between what we're doing and what was previously done is we're taking some responsibility for the effects of closing the bases, and particularly the effects on the communities.

These are two particular stories of that. This is a base that was closed in which our assistance played a key role in the community being able to recover and get a reuse plan going. That's an interesting story from the New York Times just a few days ago. And this is where we took the base, in this case Fort Ord was being closed, and took a number of major actions that were necessary to convey a major part of that property to the State of California so they could use it for a state university. So there's a new California state university campus being formed on a major section of Fort Ord. These two stories talk about one aspect of the base closing, and that falls under Josh Gotbaum's responsibility.

One other aspect of what we're doing here, which is more directly linked to more traditional environmental issues, is the conservancy of the properties which we have. To put that in perspective, you have to understand that we, the Department of Defense, have 25 million acres, so the trusteeship of that property, and in particular the conservancy of it, is a very important responsibility we have.

We manifest that in a lot of ways, but Sherry's particular responsibility in the Defense Department is for that conservancy and that trusteeship. She has other responsibilities as well, but that's one. There's an interesting article in the Nature Conservancy specifically on the question of what's going on in defense properties with regard to endangered species, for example.

Q: There was an article in National Wildlife about that that I read, maybe a few years before this one. I'm aware of some of the programs...

Perry: This is fairly recent isn't it, Sherry?

Goodman: That one's from about a year ago.

Perry: April '93.

Q: That might be more up to date, terrific.
Perry: That gives you some flavor of that aspect of it.

Another obvious aspect is what we do in cleanup of toxic pollution, waste pollution of various sorts. What we do to prevent it; what we do to clean it up when we have it; and the R&D we have underway to develop new and better methods for dealing with it. All of that falls under Sherry's responsibility. She has a vigorous set of programs. This is something, all in all, we spend a couple of billion dollars a year in, so it's a big activity in the Defense Department.

Sherry's one of the biggest program managers we have, even when you compare it with building an F-16 or something, a major weapon systems program like that. Environmental compliance programs are a very big part of our fiscal responsibility.

There are some other aspects of it which have to do with improving the quality of life for our servicemen and women, for their families, and the communities in which they live. That's not only such things as cleaning up toxic pollutants in base areas, but in creating a smoke-free workplace, for example.

An interesting way in which these two responsibilities flow together is when we close down a base, that brings front and center the issue of pollution cleanup on that base. Before we can convey the property over so a community could use it for an industrial development, say, or for a school, we have to pay very substantial attention to that problem.

There are a number of very interesting stories in that regard, but it's a big activity in the Defense Department. I give you that as a prelude to the questions you may want to ask.

Q: One background question, and one question about the ground rules of the interview. I wondered whether it would be possible to attribute the answers to you, Mr. Secretary.
Perry: Of course. We're wide open. Anything we say we're willing to be quoted on. Any one of the three of us say. If we want to say something off the record, we will make an explicit point of saying this can or should be off the record.

Q: If Sherry or Josh say something that I can attribute to you rather than to them?

Perry: Yes. As long as we're all together in saying it. I don't know what Sherry's going to say next week or next month.

(Laughter)

Q: You can reserve the right to demure...

Q: Which church do you belong to?
Perry: It's a Unitarian Church.

Q: Which particular congregation?
Perry: I'm inactive now. The Palo Alto Unitarian Church is the one I belong to. I'm a long way from Palo Alto right now.

Q: You haven't joined one since you've been here yet.
Perry: No.

Q: As a UU, do you feel a special responsibility to deal with environmental problems? Does that enter into you're having worked to create the environmental security...

Perry: I would put it the other way around. I would say whatever it was which drove me to be a Unitarian probably also precipitated my interest in environmental issues, rather than it stemmed from being Unitarian.

Q: Let me ask you about something you haven't brought up yet. I read that the Army has something called "The Environmental Strategy into the 21st Century." I wonder whether that entered into the military planning in the sense that people would consider the environmental effects of U.S. military operations to avoid things like bombing oil tankers or nuclear installations which might yield short term tactical gains, but would lead to long term environmental devastation.

Perry: There's no question that environmental considerations are a very tangible constraint on what we can and what we do in terms of military exercises, military training. Sherry might want to give you a few specific examples of that. The answer is yes to that question.

Goodman: We certainly do. As we plan our military operations today, we do consider the environmental impact. Indeed, before we sent our troops to Haiti we evaluated what the environmental conditions would be there in terms of say water supplies, providing water to others. So we do actively now, and it's only been really in the last year or so that we've begun to put some teeth into evaluating the environmental consequences of our military operations under Dr. Perry's leadership.

Q: Would that also enter into an actual armed engagement... The way it's handled might change compared to the way it was done before the environment became a consideration?

Goodman: I think the effect of the oil fires in Kuwait during the Gulf War really brought people's attention to it. I think as a Department, our military planners now are beginning to pay considerable attention to that. I think it is an evolving process as we understand better what the environmental consequences of selecting particular targets could be. But certainly that incident back a couple of years ago really put it at the center of attention.

Q: Let me move to the question of cleanup. Again in my reading I've gotten a sense that the problem is very serious. The military has been identified as the nation's number one polluter in the media. I suppose I don't have to read you the litany of various stuff that have been dumped into the ground and so forth. Granted, this may not be going on any more, but what sort of mindset ever permitted that kind of vast and unthinkable abuse?

Perry: Let me give a couple of perspectives on that, first of all. The fact that we have 25 million acres probably has something to do with the fact that we're going to be high on the list of whatever the problem is... Whatever is attributed to property, we've got a lot of it, and therefore we have a lot of opportunities.

Secondly, the article may very well be mixing together the Defense Department facilities with the Department of Energy facilities, for which there has been a very substantial and very expensive... A very substantial pollution problem, for which there's a going to be a very expensive pollution... For a whole set of technical reasons, have to do with some of the issues of nuclear energy.

A third comment is that we have, and again I'll leave a chart with you here which I think is sort of interesting. This represents a measure of how well we are doing in pollution prevention which gets to the heart of the question that you're asking here. This is one measure that -- not the only measure, of course, but thousands of pounds of waste disposed. This sort of charts that from '87 to '92.

What's significant here is the downward trend. We see it's cut in about half over that five year period. But the reason for doing this is not only to improve the environmental quality improvement, but also there is a cost avoidance aspect. To the extent you do this right, you can save yourself costs. In fact it's worth a front-end investment in order to save yourself cost downstream.

Many companies saw the value of this and the merit of this before the Defense Department and saw it was worth making investments in order to save

recurring costs five, ten, 20 years later. But that idea, as you can see, has caught on in the Defense Department too, in the last five years.

I think we're moving in parallel with industry in that regard. Sherry, would you say we're a little ahead or a little behind industry in terms of recognizing the benefits of prevention of pollution?

Goodman: It depends on the area. I think in some areas we're doing quite well. In other areas we are parallel with industry. Obviously, not all industries are the same, but you're right. We are moving with industry to particularly focus on reducing hazardous materials that we use in our weapon system acquisition process and overall in the Department.

Q: Let me approach the question from another angle. What is the Defense Department doing now to make military culture more environmentalist, and just the mindset of the base commanders, say.

Perry: I'll give you the bottom line assessment, comparing today with the late '70s when I was in the Defense Department. I'd say there's an enormous improvement in that regard. I was here from '77 to '81 and then again now. So over that 12-year span, I see a very substantial improvement. It's also, of course, reflected in the figures you see.

Those figures do reflect culture. They're not changes in culture.

Q: How have you brought that about?

Perry: Two different ways. Again, I'll have Sherry elaborate on this. We have a definite education program in this regard. That word does get out, including from the top down. Secondly, we have embodied now more and more in our regulations, in some cases in law, but in many cases in regulations, requirements that the base commanders, for example, have to meet. So any base commander has to become very familiar with these regulations or he can't do his job, and they specify what can and cannot be done in this area.

Goodman: We are working very hard to improve and expand the education and training that's provided to the whole DoD work force. We have made some significant strides in the last couple of years. To give you one specific example, just yesterday I went down to Norfolk and addressed what's now the Navy's annual environmental conference. I spoke yesterday to over 500 people in the Navy who are working in environmental fields, and they came from all around the world. They are led now in the Navy, in the uniformed side, by a two star, an admiral. This is fairly new. This is really only within the last year that the military departments have appointed first a flag officer and then someone so senior to

represent the environmental safety and occupational health work in the military departments.

Just to give you an example, more than five years ago this conference didn't exist, the one I attended yesterday. A few years ago it was maybe 100 or 150 people. Yesterday, as I said, it was 500 plus people.

Perry: To sum up then, there are three ways that we relate to this issue that you're raising. The first one is by our institution and organizations. The creation of these offices, the creation of comparable offices within the services. Having a two star admiral in charge of this in the Navy sends a very strong message. So the creation of institutions and organizations.

Secondly, educational seminars, symposia, which Sherry's given you just one fairly significant example.

The third, regulations and procedures which direct on a day to day basis what people can do.

All of those are very different today than ten years ago. They're even very different today from two years ago.

Q: Of the 10,000 or so toxic waste sites that have been identified on military installations, how many have been cleaned up to this point, and to what standard?

Goodman: We have today about 10,000 what we list as active sites on about 800 military installations. What you should know is we started with an inventory of almost 20,000 when we went out to identify all the number of sites that we had on our military installations. We've already determined that almost 10,000, it's 9,000-something of those, need no further action because just identifying them, we found they did not require any cleanup. Of the remaining 10,000 sites, we have maybe ten percent of that has been completed. The others are active programs, actively being worked at our installations. It's really our ability to bring new, innovative technologies to bear to reduce our cost of cleanup that is one of the determinants of how we will fare, and of course how well Congress supports our program which is designed to address cleanup.

Perry: Let me insert a point here. Sherry mentioned technology. It's very important to note that using 1985 technology, say, to go out and get a certain level of pollution reduction on a polluted site could cost for that site say $50 million. Now we multiply that by thousands of sites, that's a lot of money involved. So

there's an enormous incentive to find better ways of getting that pollution reduction.

We have had some good success in that on specific examples where we can make five to one or ten to one... Not just ten percent, but ten to one reductions in cost in achieving a certain level of performance. So there's a very strong incentive in doing this.

The other point I would make about this R&D for pollution reduction is that it's dual use. That is, whatever we do is generally useful to the commercial world as well. Also the pollution reduction being done by industry is useful to us. So we treat this very much as dual use technology.

Q: Does experimenting with new and sometimes untested technologies mean that sometimes cleanups are delayed?

Perry: I suppose that depends on the urgency of the cleanup project.

Goodman: It doesn't have to. If we are able to think ahead and plan into a cleanup that is going to occur over many years, a new technology in fact, what we have found is some of our conventional technologies take actually many years in operation once they're in the ground to actually do their work. So if we can find a method that takes fewer years in operation we will actually save time, even if it takes a little longer up front to actually get it into the ground...

Perry: You get a time saving as well as a cost saving.

Goodman: Correct.

Perry: In some cases, like when we're closing down a base and we're trying to transfer the property, there may be a very large incentive for getting the cleanup done right away because we may be impeded from transferring the property because of pollution on it. That can be the major obstacle in actually getting on with the economic redevelopment of the site. So that's an area that Dr. Gotbaum is very interested in.

Gotbaum: The Department of Defense is the largest industrial organization, I think I can say this, in the world, but certainly in the United States. So there are lots of industrial issues. We're closing a large naval depot in Alameda, just across the bay from San Francisco. They went through and discovered there were a variety of contaminants in the ground and the ground water in the depot area. The standard practice is water in, pump it out.

One, they said there's got to be a better, faster, cheaper way to do this. So as a result, and I think in cooperation with the University of California at Berkeley...

Goodman: Yes.

Gotbaum: They are trying as an experiment, pressurized steam which will, because it's warmer, catalyze the process; because it is under pressure, speed up the process. They hope and expect -- it is an experiment -- to achieve the result we need, which is to foster redevelopment in cleanup faster and cheaper by this method.

There's always a risk when you try something new, but in this case, the benefits are potentially so important that you have to undertake that.

Perry: That's a classic example. If the R&D works, it's both faster and cheaper. You don't have to make that tradeoff. If it turns out it doesn't work, then you've wasted that time on the experiment and now when that experiment is done and it has proven to be unsuccessful, you then have to start with the old fashioned way to do it. So in that case, it would have taken you longer. So we're betting on success.

Goodman: But it's worth taking some risks in this area sometimes, because we need to give incentives to our people on the ground to try something new because we know there are better methods out there.

Q: I wanted to revisit the question of standards which I sort of included in the previous question. Would you agree with the unnamed Pentagon official who told Time in '92 that the EPA "Would have us restore the world cleaner than God made it"?

Perry: Great line. I didn't read that one.

(Laughter)

Perry: Standards are an important question. I'm going to turn immediately to Sherry on that one.

Goodman: Standards are important, and you know there are many standards for cleanup set not only at the federal level but also by state. It is often the case that as we measure cleanup as really parts per billion of a contaminant removed from the ground water or from soil; and it's often getting those last couple of parts per billion, getting down from say 50 down to five is often the most expensive part of the cleanup. So you really want to know that you're really making a difference to human health and to the environment if you go down that low.

Now I would say that many of our standards -- one good one is trichloroethanine -- TCE. We have that at many bases. There is no one accepted standard for that. California has a standard for TCE in ground water that's based

on not degrading the ground water at all, so basically returning it to normal. If you were just thinking about enabling the ground water not to be available for use, that would be a different standard. So we're beginning now to invest some in understanding better the science behind the standards, so that we can make intelligence judgments. We, of course, want to protect the safety and health of our citizens, people who work in the military and our communities. Standards is not a settled question. Obviously, EPA and State ultimately have the final word for us in our cleanups, but we need to have good information about what we're getting for that investment so that we can use our resources, ultimately the taxpayers' resources, wisely.

Q: But regardless of how you feel, the Department is using EPA and more stringent local standards as the benchmarks for the cleanups?

Goodman: As I said, EPA and states always have to approve our cleanup remedies, so ultimately they're determining the standard.

Q: I'm very grateful for your time.

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